

From disease surveillance to the official recognition of freedom from disease for trade purposes

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Abstract

The World Organisation for Animal Health (OIE) officially recognises disease free status of countries or zones for African horse sickness (AHS), classical swine fever (CSF), contagious bovine pleuropneumonia (CBPP), foot and mouth disease (FMD), peste des petits ruminants (PPR) and risk status for bovine spongiform encephalopathy (BSE). The official recognition of disease freedom is based on an independent and transparent assessment of compliance of the applicant OIE Member Countries with the relevant requirements of the OIE *Terrestrial Animal Health Code* ('Terrestrial Code') that include, but is not limited to, provisions for disease surveillance, prevention and control as well as Veterinary Services' capacities. OIE Member Countries apply for the official recognition of a disease status on a voluntary basis. The official recognition may serve countries as a facilitative pathway to access regional and international trade markets.

Keywords: *surveillance, animal health, standards, official recognition*

Background

The OIE is the inter-governmental standard-setting body for animal health requirements recognised under the Sanitary and Phytosanitary (SPS) agreement of the World Trade Organisation (WTO). The international standards developed by the OIE for terrestrial animals are laid down in the OIE *Terrestrial Animal Health Code* which governs the safe trade and movement of live terrestrial animals and their products and in the OIE *Manual of Diagnostic Tests and Vaccines for Terrestrial Animals*, that provides internationally agreed diagnostic laboratory methods.

A procedure for the official recognition by the OIE of the free status of countries or zones was first developed at the request of OIE Members Countries for FMD in 1995. This procedure has since then been expanded to include the official recognition of disease free status for AHS, CSF, CBPP, PPR and BSE risk status. As of 2016, there are over 100 countries that are officially recognised by the OIE for having a disease free status for at least one of the six diseases included in the procedure.

Methods

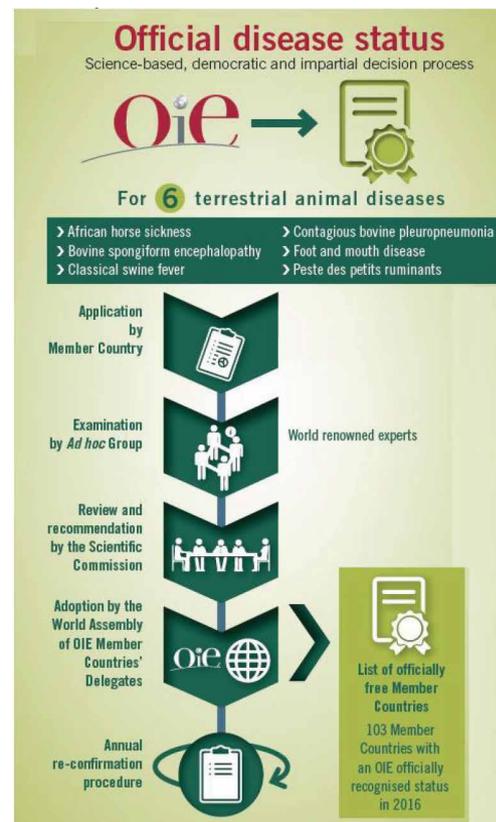
OIE Member Countries can apply for the official recognition of a disease status on a voluntary basis.

Granting, suspension and recovery of official disease status

are handled in an objective and transparent manner, governed by Standard Operating Procedures (Figure 1) adopted by the World Assembly of OIE Member Countries' Delegates (World Assembly).

The OIE organises regular regional training workshops on the procedures and requirements for official disease status recognition.

Figure 1. Procedure for the official recognition of disease status by the OIE



Initial recognition of a disease free status

Member Countries must submit to the OIE an application demonstrating compliance with all the relevant requirements specified in the 'Terrestrial Code' for the requested category of official disease status. The requirements to be complied with include –but are not limited to– provisions for disease surveillance, prevention and control, as well as Veterinary Services' capacities.

Surveillance is a critical component of all programmes to substantiate freedom from disease or infection. Applicant Member Countries should provide evidence for the existence of an effective continuing surveillance programme under the responsibility of the Veterinary Authority in compliance with OIE standards for animal health surveillance as prescribed in the *Terrestrial Code* (Chapter 1.4.) and in conjunction with the requirements for surveillance prescribed in the relevant disease-specific chapters of the *Terrestrial Code*. The epidemiology of the diseases for which the OIE officially recognises disease free status may widely differ in different regions of the world. Applicant Member Countries should provide scientifically-based supporting data to demonstrate that, based on the prevailing or historical epidemiological situation, the surveillance strategies employed demonstrate freedom from disease or infection at an acceptable level of confidence. The strategies employed to substantiate freedom may be based on clinical surveillance in conjunction with an appropriate combination of randomised or targeted serological, virological, or pathological surveillance. Sentinel animals or vector surveillance may also be considered. Applicant Member Countries should also demonstrate that appropriate follow-up is conducted on all suspicions and that the laboratory methods applied to test for the disease are in accordance with the *Terrestrial Manual*.

Member Countries' applications are assessed by the OIE Scientific Commission for Animal Diseases (the Scientific Commission) composed of six specialists in animal disease control elected by the World Assembly.

The assessment by the Scientific Commission is usually preceded by an evaluation by relevant ad hoc Groups of experts composed of world specialists for each particular disease. The Scientific Commission is in charge of formulating recommendations for adoption by the World Assembly during the OIE General Session that takes place in May every year.

Expert missions to applicant Member Countries may be carried out as deemed necessary to verify and complement the elements presented in their application before a recommendation is made by the Scientific Commission.

Maintenance over time of a disease free status

OIE Member Countries having at least one officially recognised disease status are obliged to reconfirm annually to the OIE that this status has remained unchanged in accordance with the corresponding articles in the 'Terrestrial Code'.

Amongst other element, the annual reconfirmation should provide evidence that the surveillance programme has been continued, is still adapted to the epidemiological situation and to the risk assessment and has proved effective to demonstrate absence. This surveillance programme should include an early warning system for detecting, identifying and reporting suspected cases that require immediate follow-up and investigation. Details of the occurrence of suspected cases and how they were investigated and dealt with should

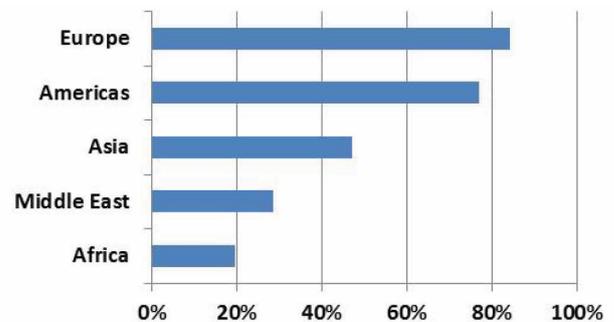
also be documented.

Officially free disease status may be suspended following occurrence of an outbreak or for other reasons such as lack of transparency in animal disease reporting or failure to reconfirm in due time the compliance with the conditions for maintenance of its status.

Results

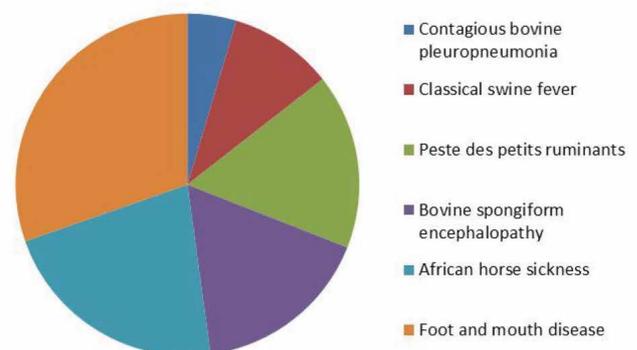
In 2016, 56% of the OIE member countries had at least one officially recognised disease free status. However, a wide variability was observed per region (Figure 2). For instance, only 20% of Member Countries in Africa and 29% of the Member Countries in Middle East had a least one officially recognised disease free status.

Figure 2. Proportion of OIE Member countries having at least one officially recognised disease free status by regions in 2016.



In 2016, 326 officially recognised disease free status were active around the world. FMD and AHS were most frequent, accounting respectively for 29% and 21% of the active recognised free status (Figure 3).

Figure 3. Repartition of the officially recognised disease free status active in 2016 by disease.



The most current information on all officially recognised disease free status can be consulted on-line: www.oie.int/official-status.

Discussion

The independent process of official recognition of disease free status by the OIE ensures transparency in animal disease situation and promotes animal health and public health worldwide.

The confirmation of the continuous compliance over time with the conditions for a disease free status is critical to ensure the credibility of the granted status, the capability of Veterinary Services and ultimately, to ensure the safety for international trade. To further increase confidence in the maintenance over time in the disease free status officially recognised, the OIE has engaged in the process of strengthening the procedures for the annual reconfirmations of the free status.

The recognition of disease free status by the OIE is indeed of great significance for international trade by facilitating access to regional and international markets which will help increase economic potentialities of the livestock sector (Figure 4).

Figure 4. Benefits of the official recognition of disease status by the OIE

